

A Note from the Poetry Editor

IN JULY OF 1995, NOT LONG AFTER STARTING MY THIRD YEAR OF MEDICAL school, a friend of mine from graduate school, Jessica Dineen, asked me to help her read poems for the *New England Review*. Jessica and I had been classmates in the MFA Program at the University of Florida. We had both done internships with literary magazines while we were undergraduates in Boston. We had joked often as graduate students that we should start up our own literary magazine; she would edit fiction and I would edit poetry. After finishing up in our MFA program, Jessica went to work for *Ploughshares* and then for *NER*. I went to medical school.

Just after starting with *NER*, Jessica discovered there was a bit of a backlog of poems in the office. And so began my work with this magazine. I was never formally hired. I was never even interviewed. I had, for all intents and purposes, no business editing poetry for a literary magazine, much less one that was already seventeen years old and well-respected. I winnowed down the backlog, found poems I felt were strong, and recommended them to Stephen Donadio, the then still new editor of the magazine. Within a few months, I was given the title of poetry consultant. Not long thereafter, I was made an associate editor; a few years later, I was given the title of poetry editor.

My job at *NER* over the past nineteen years, despite the changes in my title, has changed very little. I read a lot of poems. Every so often, I found some that surprised me, stunned me, poems that seemed to demand they have an audience. But thinking back now, so much has changed at *NER* and in the world since I started with the magazine back in 1995. For one, I used to mail in my reports and recommendations. This was followed by the miraculously fast process of the fax machine. Fax! Email came along, and for many years it was how I did my work at a magazine in Vermont, despite never once living in New England while working for the magazine. And then, electronic submissions systems arrived. But none of these things changed the essential job of editing poetry: reading.

Week after week, month after month, year after year, I have read now tens of thousands of poems. But always, what I have looked for, longed for, is surprise and a sense that there is urgency, a *need* for a particular poet to write a particular poem. Once I find such poems, I set them aside and reread them a few more times to make sure. Month after month, in small batches, I have sent these poems on to Stephen Donadio (more recently to his successor Carolyn Kuebler). As a result of this piecemeal work, I never saw an entire issue's worth of poetry for *NER* before receiving the actual hard copy of the magazine, except for one or two special issues. I have, therefore, always looked forward to each and every issue of the magazine. I read it cover to cover: the poems, the stories,

the amazing range of nonfiction. And each and every issue has reminded me that this magazine, which we like to think of as a community, is also a kind of organism. The editors of this magazine affect the magazine, but I also feel very strongly that the magazine also affects its editors.

It will be difficult in the coming months for me not to want to find poems for these pages, but I also know that when a new issue arrives in my mailbox, I will devour it with the same excitement I have felt during my entire adult life. I never imagined I would edit poems for *NER* for even five years. So, it is still a shock for me to realize how long I have held this position. It has been an honor to work alongside editors like Jessica Dineen, Jodee Stanley, and Carolyn Kuebler. In the end, I need to thank Stephen Donadio for giving a young and barely published poet studying medicine in 1995 the amazing opportunity that he did.

It was not an easy decision to leave my post at *NER*, but once I decided to do it, I knew I wanted to do a retrospective of the work I have selected over my nineteen years. Even as I voiced the decision to myself, there were at least ten poems from these pages that had never left me alone, that haunted me, so much so I sometimes felt as if they were my own poems. I can even recite many of them. I wrote down these titles and then read through every issue I have helped put together in my time with the magazine to find another ten. I culled and culled until I had the twenty poems from my time with *NER* that not only never left me alone but actually changed me as a reader and writer. They changed my mind, and they changed my heart. They are scattered throughout this issue, and I hope you enjoy them as much as I do.

—*CDY*